



YOUR LETTERS

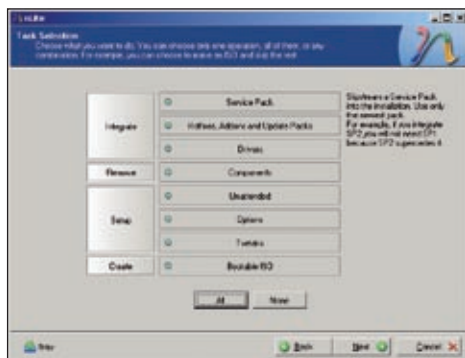
MAILBOX

Just when we thought the world had stopped caring about *Shopper*, a reader gives us a hearty endorsement. Still, apparently there's plenty for you to get irritated about

★ Star Letter Slip-sliding away



Reading *Under Development* in *Shopper*, May 2007, I was surprised to see David Robinson saying that slipstreaming is "an awful lot of faffing". Before I knew about a program called nLite, I would have agreed with him. However, nLite (which can be



▲ David Robinson wouldn't dread slipstreaming if he knew about nLite

downloaded for free at www.nliteos.com) simplifies the slipstreaming process into four easy steps, allowing you to integrate service packs, updates and drivers, remove components such as MSN Explorer or Outlook Express, set up the installation methods and even pre-load the serial key and settings for a fully automatic install. It will even create a bootable ISO disc image.

It makes you wonder why Microsoft doesn't provide its own application for slipstreaming and, also, an application to make bootable USB keys.

Paul Martin

Thanks for that handy tip, Paul. If you need to install Windows with the same configuration on lots of PCs, or you intend to run a fresh installation on the same PC multiple times, using slipstreaming can save a lot of time in the long run. For those readers who do not intend to change their hardware, creating a disk image of an existing, clean installation with an application such as Acronis True Image 10 can save even more time.

MOVE TO LINUX



I feel quite sorry for Ken Dickinson, whose letter you printed in *Shopper* May 2007. He had a problem with his motherboard and Microsoft's attitude to his request to reactivate an OEM copy of Windows. His last comment was interesting: "Perhaps this will be a lesson to all other would-be system builders not to use the OEM version – or to switch to Linux!"

This attitude is reminiscent of newcomers to Linux when things don't work as they expect. At that point they say, "I'll go back to Windows". However, I think a perfectly valid option for him in this case would be to give Linux a damned good try, although he should of course follow your advice and give Microsoft one more go.

I have been a Linux user on and off since Windows XP first came out. I didn't like the new Microsoft End-User License Agreement (EULA), which tied the operating system to the hardware. After making several changes to your hardware, you had to beg Microsoft to reactivate Windows, although I believe this was true only for a full licence and not for an OEM one. So I voted with my feet and eventually came to use Linux all the time. When I bought my new notebook this year, it gave me the greatest pleasure to boot it for the first time, not agree with the EULA and slip my OpenSUSE disc in and install Linux on the whole drive with no Windows at all.

Unlike Ken, I don't have to ask anyone's permission to use the operating system, and I can copy it as often as I like and give it to anyone I want. I can download it free of charge, change the code or hack

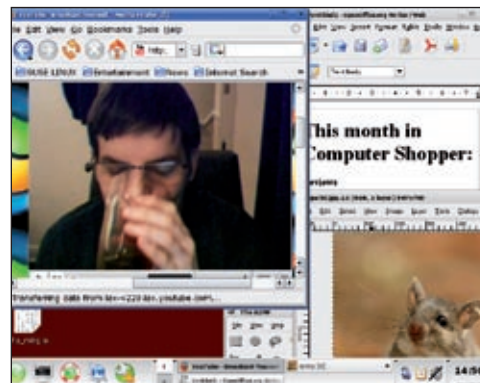
it as much as I want (if only I knew how). I can install it on as many computers as I like and it didn't cost me £60 per day to use.

Ken should vote with his feet, install Linux and enjoy the freedom. He may even come to prefer Linux, as I do. If enough people make the switch as a protest against Microsoft's onerous licensing demands, eventually Microsoft will change its tune. By then, it may need more than just a change in the licensing agreement.

By the way, if Ken wants any help or advice with OpenSUSE, please pass him my email address.

Terry Pike

While moving from Windows to Linux is a feasible option for many, it is sensible only for those who are



▲ If all you want to do is browse the web and check email, Linux is a good alternative to Windows

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not bothered about using the wide range of software available for Windows PCs. One of the reasons that PCs have outsold Macs for many years is the vast number of games and other applications that have been created to run solely on DOS and Windows.

If all you want to do is browse the internet, check email and use a word processor, switching away from Windows to Linux (or to one of many other free alternative operating systems) is a good way to avoid agreeing to what you consider a restrictive user licence. If you want to play the latest games and have the best choice of commercial software, you'll need a Windows PC.

The number of high-quality Linux-based applications is growing, though, and it is possible to download specialist applications, such as creative software for creating music, editing video or designing websites. Getting these up and running is not always as simple as installing Windows software, so undertaking the Linux route needs to be done in an adventurous frame of mind, but it can be a rewarding experience.

That said, if you want an easy life and just need to get the job done, Windows is our choice of desktop operating system. Many readers have written to us with concerns about OEM licensing, or with opinions that differ to the previous answers we have given on previous *Mailbox* pages. This month, we spoke to Michala Alexander, Microsoft UK Head of Anti-Piracy, to clear things up.

She confirmed our previous advice, which is that readers can buy an OEM copy of Windows and install it on a PC they have built themselves. This makes them a 'system builder' as far as Microsoft is concerned. As we have said before, system builders provide technical support to their customers, so if you install an OEM copy on a PC you have built then you essentially provide yourself with technical support and Microsoft will not.

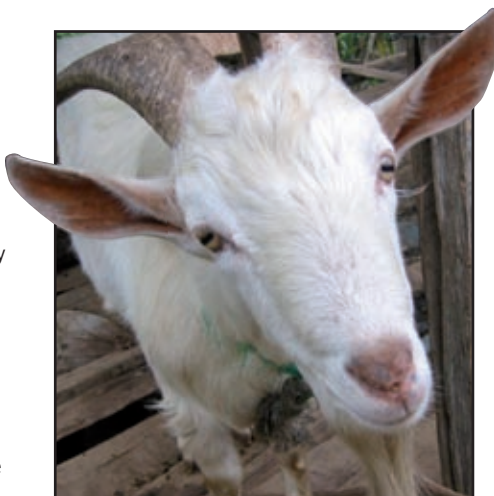
In Ken's case, he changed the motherboard of his PC to a different model after the original failed. This counts as a hardware upgrade, which renders an OEM licence void. However, there is some flexibility here. If the original motherboard was still under warranty, he should have sought an exact replacement from the company that sold him the board. If the motherboard was no longer protected by a warranty, and an exact replacement was no longer available, then Microsoft will allow its replacement with another model. Doing so will require a phone call to Microsoft, explaining why the hardware has changed, after which it will be possible to activate the system.

BILL OF RIGHTS



I read some time ago an article about the legality of software licensing and the sometimes draconian restrictions declared in the boilerplate. From what I remember, while it's possible to write pretty much what you like into a licence agreement, that doesn't necessarily make it legally enforceable.

For example (and I'm guessing here), I expect Microsoft has a passage in the licence requiring you to give up your first-born son and to make an annual sacrifice of two goats to appease the blue screen of death. But if you



▲ Live sacrifice is not part of the Microsoft licence agreement and is not endorsed by *Shopper*

failed to do this and Microsoft challenged it, it would almost certainly lose the case in court. Likewise, attempts to restrict the resale of a licence are not compatible with UK law, nor would be restrictions that stopped you transferring your licence from an old PC to a new one (fully erasing the old installation, of course).

I'm off to the farmers' market now. I need a couple of chickens to fulfil my Ubuntu installation requirements.

Steve Hunt

Microsoft's anti-piracy team does not bother tracking down individuals who sell each other PCs and do not conform exactly to the licensing restrictions. It is more interested in breaking organised rings of software counterfeiters.

Even so, if you sold an old PC to a friend, or installed your copy of Windows on their PC (after uninstalling it from your own, of course), you are in breach of Microsoft's rules. Whether or not you are in breach of the law depends on how the courts view Microsoft's rules. A judge might decide that the rules are fair, or not. Any that involve goat sacrifice are unlikely to stick.

However, if you break the licence agreement and then run into activation problems with products such as Windows XP, Office XP or Windows Vista, you wouldn't expect Microsoft to help you get things working again. It is also

doubtful you would win a case against Microsoft to force it to provide technical support.

CHAOS FROM ORDER



Have you pulled a fast one with 'How To... Create order from chaos' (*Shopper* June 2007)? I suspect you would get the same result if you repeatedly plotted mid-points to all three corners of the triangle rather than one selected randomly. If so, chaos and randomness don't come into it. I'd try it, but I think it would need something more versatile than Excel or VBA to plot the points.

Chris Stradling

Mike Bedford writes:

You might be right, although, like you, I don't have access to a fully blown programming language to check it out. It is certainly true that there are lots of ways to generate fractal images like the Sierpinsky Gasket we produced. But being able to generate an ordered image from an ordered set of instructions isn't particularly surprising. What is rather more interesting is generating one from what appears to be a random sequence of events.

WINDOWS XP RIP



Now Windows Vista has been launched, how long before Microsoft pulls the plug on support for Windows XP Home Edition and Windows XP Media Edition? The big question is, once it does pull the plug, what happens if you need to reinstall and reactivate your Windows XP operating system? Will the activation process still work or not?

Les Dixon

Windows XP Home and Media Center Editions will continue to be available through retail until 31st January 2008. System Builder licences will continue for another year. After that, extended support will be available until April 2014. Extended support, which is not usually available for consumer products, provides free security updates but bugs that are not related to security won't be fixed.

As for whether or not Microsoft will continue to run its Windows XP activation service in seven years' time, it's too early to tell. It's an

WRITE IN AND WIN!

Everyone runs out of disk space sooner or later. One way to solve the problem is to send us a great letter. That's because Western Digital has kindly agreed to furnish our Star Letter writers with an award-winning 500GB My Book Pro Edition hard disk. This external drive connects using USB2 or FireWire. It supports both FireWire 400 and 800, and can transfer data twice as fast as some other external disks we've tested. Honoured with *Shopper's* Best Buy award in the January 2007 issue, this sleek-looking unit comes complete with Retrospect backup software and even has an LED indicator on the front to display how much free disk space remains.



PLUS!

Every published letter-writer who provides their address also receives a *Computer Shopper* mug



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interesting question, because this is the first time a Microsoft operating system that requires activation has approached the end of its life.

If you don't intend to change your Windows XP PC's hardware, you can attempt to avoid reactivating it by creating a special backup of the activation status on a floppy disk. Details of how to do this are at www.theelderageek.com/activation_workaround.htm. It involves copying the wpa.dbl and wpa.bak files from your system32 folder to a floppy and replacing them after reinstalling Windows.

SPY CATCHER, PART I



No doubt you get plenty of these queries, but I'm just a PC user hoping to reach nerd level at some point. Geek status is out of the question. In *Shopper* May 2007, I noticed your generous list of free software included a trial scan by Spyware Doctor 4.

Well, my PC seemed to be a bit slow, so I ran the scan and it came up with 212 infections, one of which was a Trojan. I have Norton software, which did not find any infections. I'm told anti-spyware is free on the internet and I downloaded Spybot, which promptly demanded payment. As it is under the jurisdiction of Czech law, I bailed out of this. However, Spybot refuses to be deleted.

There's more. *Computer Shopper* comes to the rescue with the April edition, which includes the free AVG anti-virus software. Well, that scan found nothing, even after the updates were loaded. I then noticed the free Microsoft Defender, but after updates that scan found nothing, either.

Before I run out of disk space with free anti-spyware software, can someone tell me who to believe? If Spyware Doctor is the dog's whatnots, I'll buy it.

Paul McLoughlin

As you have discovered, not all security tools are as effective as you would imagine. As our anti-virus test in *Shopper* April 2007 showed, Norton AntiVirus is an average product that does not provide complete protection against all the threats we have encountered. The same goes for AVG, although at least that is free. Our tests of Microsoft Defender also indicate that this high-profile product is not the best available.

Spyware Doctor is a decent program, as shown by our own test results and the fact that it detected infections on your system that both Norton and AVG anti-virus products missed. We would definitely recommend buying it.

It is concerning that you say you downloaded Spybot, only for it to demand payment. Spybot Search & Destroy is a free program that should be easy to remove. The fact that your copy has asked for money and is hard to remove suggests that you may have accidentally downloaded a fake version that is spyware in disguise. The real one is available from www.safer-networking.org.

SPY CATCHER, PART II



In *Shopper* May 2007, you suggested using Spyware Doctor 4 as a free anti-spyware scanner.

Well, I thought you might have checked out what this does. I loaded Spyware Doctor 4 for the scan, as I told you in my previous email, and it produced a result of 212 infections,

including a Trojan. I decided not to buy it as earlier Norton scans produced no infections.

Little did I realise that Spyware Doctor 4 installed itself on to my computer and slowed it down by using 95 per cent of its processing time. I assumed that if I bought it, it would miraculously start working again. It cost me £30 to find all this out, so as far as I'm concerned your credibility is in the toilet.

Paul McLoughlin

Choosing not to buy Spyware Doctor because it detects more infections than less-effective software does not make any sense. Don't assume that it is falsely reporting infections, just because other products claim that your system is clean and you would prefer to believe that.

Your decision to pay for Spyware Doctor is a good one and, combined with a decent anti-virus package such as Steganos Anti-Virus 2007, it should help keep your PC clear of most common viruses and spyware. All good anti-virus and anti-spyware software uses system resources, and running a scan using any of them will slow down a system considerably. You should schedule scans for times when you don't intend to use the PC.

Steer clear of downloading file-sharing applications and programs from unverified sources, and you'll reduce the risk of downloading spyware considerably.

YOU MUGS



In reference to 'A Mug's Game' in *Letters*, *Shopper* May 2007, I cannot believe you drink tea from common or garden clay mugs. Surely only

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china is suitable for tea? Clay mugs are suitable for coffee, but tea? In our house we still use the china mugs we acquired with our Esso Tokens years ago.

David Sherriff

We put your thoughts about tea and china to the person who looks after the valuable (albeit clay) mugs. After some time deliberating she judged: "Well, he's not getting a mug anyway, because he didn't send in his address."

TUBE STRIKE



Until a few years ago, *Computer Shopper* received letters delivered only by Royal Mail. We got the odd fax, too, but then email largely replaced the way that you communicate with us. This

month, in what could mark the beginning of a new and exciting trend, we have found our first reader on YouTube.

A young man calling himself JazzmickGE (pictured below) was so impressed by our anti-virus group test in *Shopper* April 2007, he published a video of himself discussing the reviews and our conclusions. You can view his videos, including 'Anti-virus warning', at www.youtube.com/profile?user=JazzmickGE.

We'd like to encourage you to give video communication a try, particularly as using YouTube is very easy. If you publish a *Shopper*-related video and send us a link, we may even reward you with a valuable *Shopper* mug for your trouble. This time around, we have decided to honour JazzmickGE with David Sherriff's "common or garden" mug. ☺



◀ JazzmickGE: bringing communications with *Shopper* bang up to date

Advertisers' index

1&1	77
123 Reg	53
Aspect	OBC
AVG	15
Bit Defender	125
Buffalo	19
CCL	IBC
CET	73
Crucial	78
Cube	67-69
Cyberlink	128
Cyberpower	66, 74
Dabs	21
Dell	IFC
Ebuyer	92
Evesham	113-117
Fasthosts	91
IView Cameras	108
Komplett	27
Laptops Direct	195
Linksys	74, 94
Mesh Computers	59-63
MSI	33
Oyyy.co.uk	103
PC Nextday	104
PC Specialist	64-65
Printerbase	100
Samsung	97
Selwyn Electronics	100
Time	132, 134

Classified index

247 ink	199
Abel Gratis	198
Cartridge Express	197
Dataquest International	197
Eoutlet	197
ImageTek	198
Ink Prices	197
Inkwell	197
Manx	200
MX2	198
Picstop	200
www.computerbattery.co.uk	198

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